It's Tuesday, June 2. Bookmark this email--we've been busy and have so much to tell you. In today's issue: News from our director; historical roots of the George Floyd protests in Nebraska; legendary Peter Sarpy; rubber coats and Chief Blackbird; historic preservation gets personal; writer Marion Marsh Brown; and Mad Science at the Museum.

From our director

Dear members and friends:

Thank you for your support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Studying history reminds us that people in the past made it through their own trials and tribulations -- and they kept on going. At History Nebraska we haven't stopped working and we're also making changes to better serve your needs.

For parents and educators, we developed a **Teacher Toolkit** which provide History lessons online. A series of short videos called Museum Minutes highlight activities behind the scenes--**follow us on Instagram** to see them.

We've also launched a statewide initiative to **collect items related to COVID-19**. It is exciting to think that we are living during a time that will be studied for generations. History Nebraska is working to collect materials that will help future historians understand our lives right now.

and historic sites safely while providing the excellent interpretation and customer service we are known for. Look for more announcements about reopening soon.

If you are a member of History Nebraska, thank you so much for your support! If you're not a member, please consider **joining or making a donation** in support of our programs. If you can't afford that right now, we understand. (But if you wanted to tell your friends about us, we would not object!)

I believe history is a tool that helps us create a better world. Studying the past allows us to envision a better future for all Nebraskans. Thanks for your help.

Trevor Jones
Director & CEO

The historical roots of the George Floyd protests in Nebraska

Someday a historian will write a *Nebraska History* article examining the George Floyd protests in our state. Right now we're still reading fresh headlines and watching newly-posted videos. We're still dazed from a montage of peaceful protests, confrontations with police, and late-night chaos in the streets of Omaha and Lincoln. We are still too close to these events to see them with the clarity of history.

But we know that we are seeing history in the making. And we know that the present

as we understand them at present. **Keep reading.**

ICYMI: How a kind message on a donut bag helped launch our COVID-19 collecting project. **Read more in the Lincoln Journal Star**.

Sarpy County's namesake was "a legend in his own time"

Peter Sarpy (1805-1865) was an important trader whose career spanned Nebraska's fur trade and territorial periods. This 1852 portrait by St. Louis artist Manuel Joachim de Franca is part of the Nebraska History Museum collections. It was painted five years before the Nebraska legislature named Sarpy County in his honor.

"Sarpy lived the life of a minor frontier baron," writes John Wickman, who says Sarpy was known for his hospitality and for his love of "fast horses, fine hunting dogs, and a considerable interest in the pleasures of liquor." Keep reading.

Rubber coats and Chief Blackbird's fragile document

History Nebraska's Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center has some new projects to show you. Paper conservator Hilary LeFevere works fast, doesn't she?
She's conserving a fragile 224-year-old document given by the Spanish governor of Louisiana to Chief Blackbird of the Omaha tribe. It was in bad shape when it arrived at the Omaha facility. Read more.

how to treat 1860s rubber raincoats. The “slickers,” as they were called, sank in the Missouri River with the steamboat *Bertrand* and spent more than 100 years buried in the mud. Some are almost like new, but others are brittle. The coats need support to maintain their shape, and must be stored in an oxygen-free environment. Keep reading**.**

And about that Peter Sarpy portrait shown above… the photo is from the Ford Center’s paintings lab after Kenneth Bé restored it in 2011.

Historic Preservation gets personal

History Nebraska is home of the State Historic Preservation Office. The SHPO

Places, surveys of historic buildings, by working with local governments, and by monitoring government-funded projects to make sure they comply with preservation rules.

There's a personal aspect to all this. In a recent series of blog posts, the SHPO staff talk about what their work means to them.

For some, it started in childhood. "My father was handicapped so we didn't go skiing or to the beach," writes Jill Dolberg. "But my father loved to visit historic places—places where things happened. He instilled that appreciation in me. There are places where history really resonates and you can feel it while you are there—**you feel a connection that you can't get from a book**. At the time, I didn't have the right vocabulary to describe it but I felt it." Read more**.**

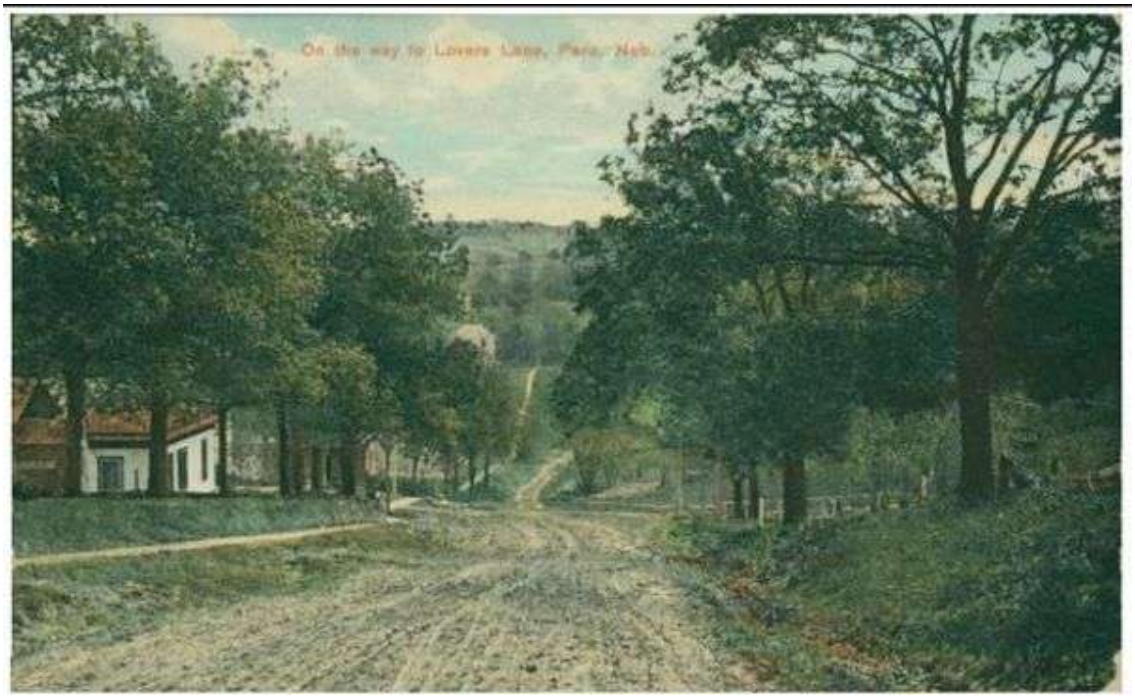
Kelli Bacon, daughter of a real estate appraiser, remembers driving around the countryside to look at farmsteads her father was appraising. He "would give me a plat map and ask me to navigate our way. This was a great introduction to map reading." Entering abandoned farmhouses, Kelli would "**imagine the lives of the people who once lived there** while admiring the architecture." Read more**.**

Ryan Reed is fascinated by an 1890 building in downtown Chadron. It's a picturesque corner building, but it gets better if you know the stories it contains. One of its early owners was Mary Smith Hayward, a prominent **Nebraska suffragist who once refused to pay her taxes** to protest women being unable to vote. Read more**.**

Volunteer Matt Hansen was writing a National Register nomination for **Robber's Cave** (Lincoln) when he started thinking about using new technologies to document the site. A partnership between History Nebraska and UNL led to detailed LiDAR scanning of the cave's richly carved walls. Read more**.**

You don't have to be a historic preservationist to find a personal connection in historic places. "I encourage you to ask a friend or family member the question: **'Is there an old**

Nebraska writer Marion Marsh Brown



Marion Marsh Brown grew up in a hurry. She published her first story at age 10 and graduated from high school at age 14. Her beloved father died when she was a 15-year-old freshman at the Nebraska State Teacher's College (today's Peru State). Brown's family encouraged her to stay in school, and Brown graduated with high honors in three-and-a-half years. But it wasn't easy being so much younger than her classmates.

Brown went on to a long career as both a teacher and novelist. She wrote fiction and biographies for middle school students, and many of her books reflect her southeast Nebraska roots and her love of Nebraska history. Dan Holtz tells her story in the Spring 2020 issue of *Nebraska History.*

It's not hard to understand Holtz's affinity for Brown. He's a professor emeritus of history at

Popular on our blog and social media

Chimney Rock site supervisor Loren Pospisil talks about visible remnants of the Oregon, Mormon, and California trails in this recent video.

The internet loves **Andy the footless goose**.

And **Barbara Cizek and her wood stove** are still popular.

The *Stanton Register* newspaper office **apparently didn't have an interior decorator** in 1908.

Did you know that the smallest city hall in the United States is in Nebraska? **Do you know which town?**

Upcoming events

Did you know that cooking is a type of science? Come see (via Zoom) how early settlers and travelers in Nebraska used kitchen science to keep themselves alive! Keep reading.

This email was written by David Bristow, Editor, and Josh Lottman. history.nebraska.gov
Want to change how you receive these emails? You can update your preferences or unsubscribe from this list.

Complete articles:

The historical roots of the George Floyd protests in Nebraska

Photo: Nebraska National Guardsmen confront protestors at 24th and Maple Streets in Omaha, July 5, 1966. History Nebraska RG2467-23

By David L. Bristow, Editor

June 2, 2020

Someday a historian will write a *Nebraska History* article examining the George Floyd protests in our state. Right now we're still reading fresh headlines and watching newly-posted videos. We're still dazed from a montage of peaceful protests, confrontations with police, and late-night chaos in the streets of Omaha and Lincoln. We are still too close to these events to see them with the clarity of history.

But we know that we are seeing history in the making. And we know that the present situation didn't arise solely from recent events.

Just as obviously, it didn't arise strictly from local events. When an unarmed African American man is murdered by police in Minneapolis, and in response people take to the streets across the United States and in cities as far away as London, Berlin, and Rio de Janeiro, you know that you're looking at the tip of a very large iceberg.

The Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture has recently launched **Talking About Race**, "a new online portal designed to help individuals, families, and communities talk about racism, racial identity and the way these forces shape every aspect of society, from the economy and politics to the broader American culture."

This post isn't nearly as ambitious, but it's meant as a Nebraska resource for similar conversations. Here I want to look briefly at some aspects of African American history in Nebraska and link to some of our online resources. This is not a full summary of Nebraska's black history, merely a quick sketch of the deep roots of present-day injustices, as we understand them at present.

***

If you read just one thing about the roots of civil unrest in Nebraska, make it this: Ashley Howard's award-winning *Nebraska History* article about the 1960s uprisings, **"'And Then the Burnings Began': Omaha's Urban Revolts and the Meaning of Political Violence**."

That said, let's go back further in time.

***

Photo: This is the earliest known photograph of African Americans in Nebraska, taken in Brownville in 1864. History Nebraska RG3190-285x

People have lived in Nebraska for thousands of years, but its history as an organized US territory

begins with the **Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854**. The law repealed an earlier law banning slavery in this part of the country, and was so controversial that it is considered one of the major events leading to the Civil War.

In other words, Nebraska Territory was born in controversy over slavery. Slavery was legal here until the territorial legislature abolished it in 1861—overriding the governor's veto to do so.

Thirteen years later, the State of Nebraska was born in a controversy over voting rights for black men. Our original proposed state constitution restricted voting rights to white men. That wasn't unusual at the time. But Congress rejected Nebraska statehood until voting was open to all men (but not women). Read more and see snippets of original documents on **p. 8 of this PDF**.

The voting rights controversy of 1867 is **how we got our state motto**, "Equality Before the Law." It was an optimistic time. Most white Americans—even most abolitionists—held deeply racist views, and yet the war ended with burst of idealism among northern Republicans. To be fair, expanding the vote was also shrewd politics, a way of creating millions of Southern Republican voters. But many Northerners, **including this Nebraska man**, rejoiced that the reunited nation was moving quickly toward full racial equality.

It didn't last. Southern black voters were terrorized by "Redeemers" and the Ku Klux Klan, while Northern defense of civil rights faded quickly. J. Sterling Morton of Nebraska City (remembered as the founder of Arbor Day) was on the losing side of the abolition and voting rights arguments, but as the years passed, **Morton's racist opinions** proved to be more mainstream than those of 1860s Radical Republicans.

***

Photo: The Shores family, Custer County homesteaders, Nebraska, 1887. History Nebraska

RG2608-1231

To be an African American settler in Nebraska meant facing all the usual frontier hardships in addition to the unnecessary burdens of prejudice, a story told in Todd Guenther's "**The Empire Builders: An African American Odyssey in Nebraska and Wyoming**" (PDF). It meant sending your children to **segregated schools in Nebraska City** (PDF), or serving in a **segregated army at Fort Robinson** (PDF).

Nebraska's African American population remained small until the Great Migration of the early twentieth century. Millions of Southern blacks moved to northern cities in search of better jobs and more freedom. But the turbulent year following the end of World War I saw a violent backlash against African Americans, including the 1919 **lynching of Will Brown in Omaha**.

Even within the law, a black man stood little chance when accused of a crime against whites. Despite the flimsy case against him, Charles Smith died in prison for the 1917 murder of Claude Nethaway's wife, even though it looked like **Nethaway himself was the murderer**.

The 1920s saw the rise of the second Ku Klux Klan, which at one time claimed **45,000 Nebraska Klan members**. Civil rights leaders in those days might work a lifetime only to find conditions worse than when they started, as in the inspiring but ultimately **tragic story of Omaha's Rev. Russel Taylor** (PDF).

And yet, Nebraska's African American community persisted. Many of us learned in school of the "Harlem Renaissance" of the 1920s, but Harlem's flowering of black culture was part of a nationwide movement. The **photography of Lincoln's John Johnson** (PDF) was one part of this assertion of black dignity and self-determination.

***

Photo: Mildred Brown and some of the DePorres Club members. History Nebraska RG5503-8

Following World War II, the Civil Rights Movement didn't arise all at once, but developed piece by piece in various communities. Joe Ishikawa spent time in a US internment camp for Japanese Americans before moving to Lincoln. When, as a city employee, he discovered that the municipal swimming pool banned African Americans, he quit his job and joined local black leaders in a **successful protest**.

The story of the Lincoln pool is remarkable for what it reveals about Northern segregation. Not one city official defended the policy—but no one wanted to change it, either, claiming fear of public opinion.

"It's always other people," Ishikawa remembered thinking. "I haven't met an honestly prejudiced person yet."

In Omaha, meanwhile, publisher Mildred Brown was mobilizing her newspaper, the *Omaha Star*, against local discrimination. Brown played a key role in a multiracial coalition known as the DePorres Club. Among other accomplishments, the DePorres Club **led a successful bus boycott** (PDF) four years before the one in Montgomery, Alabama.

Other local civil rights groups won important victories in the 1950s and 1960s, but certain fundamental injustices remained: housing and job discrimination, unequal schools, and unequal policing—all of which bring us back to **Dr. Howard's article, "And Then the Burnings Began."** The nationwide failure of leaders and businesses to respond to nonviolent protest led to the "long hot summers" of the late 1960s.

Dirk Chatelain of the *Omaha World-Herald* provides another view of this crucial period in his recent book, ***24th and Glory: The Intersection of Civil Rights and Omaha's Greatest Generation of Athletes.*** And longtime *World-Herald* photographer Rudy Smith documented everything from the late-1960s turmoil, to the 1970s school busing controversy, to daily life in ***The Black Experience Through the Lens of Rudy Smith***. Both books were published with the support of History Nebraska.

***

This is only a partial survey of Nebraska's African American history. It follows the story up to about fifty years ago, and even then with major gaps. (See also this **special issue of *Nebraska History,*** and this PDF of **African American Resources at History Nebraska**.) The idea is to show something of the long struggle for equality and to provide links to our most helpful resources.

But there's something else, something that may only become clear as you start clicking links and diving deeper into the sources. Perhaps the most tragic thing about all this history—aside from the fact that it happened at all—is how much of it is still unresolved, how much still seems relevant in the troubled year of 2020.

Sarpy County's namesake "a legend in his own time"

By David L. Bristow, Editor

The namesake of Sarpy County, Peter Sarpy (1805-1865) was an important trader whose career spanned Nebraska's fur trade and territorial periods. This 1852 portrait by St. Louis artist Manuel Joachim de Franca is part of the Nebraska History Museum collections.

"Sarpy's life is not easy to chronicle for he became a legend in his own time," writes historian John Wickman.

Sarpy was born to a French Creole family, probably in St. Louis. His early life is poorly documented, but it appears that at age 19 he traveled up the Missouri River to present-day Nebraska. He worked at the American Fur Company's trading post near Bellevue. The company brought manufactured goods upstream by keelboat, traded for furs with local Native tribes, and sent the furs back to St. Louis. Later he operated his own trading post, eventually trading with white settlers arriving in the area and operating ferries across the Missouri, Elkhorn, and Loup

rivers.

Young Sarpy was known for his fierce competitiveness, and was loyal to his employer, John P. Cabanne. Acting on Cabanne's orders, in 1832 Sarpy and others illegally seized a competitor's keelboat. The action got Cabanne and Sarpy temporarily kicked out of the territory.

Sarpy was also known for his ability to gain the respect of Native tribes in the region. He was in contact with tribes within several hundred miles of Bellevue. Like many fur traders, he married a Native woman. This certainly helped solidify his trading relationships, but it seems to have been more than just a strategic union—Peter and Nicomi remained married for the rest of Sarpy's life.

As a businessman, Sarpy adapted to changing times. By the 1850s he was operating a ferry across the Missouri River, serving a growing number of emigrants heading west along the trails. In 1854, the year Nebraska Territory opened to Euroamerican settlement, Sarpy bought a 165-ton steam ferry and played a prominent role in negotiating land cessions by the Omaha and Oto tribes. In 1857 the Nebraska legislature named Sarpy County in his honor.

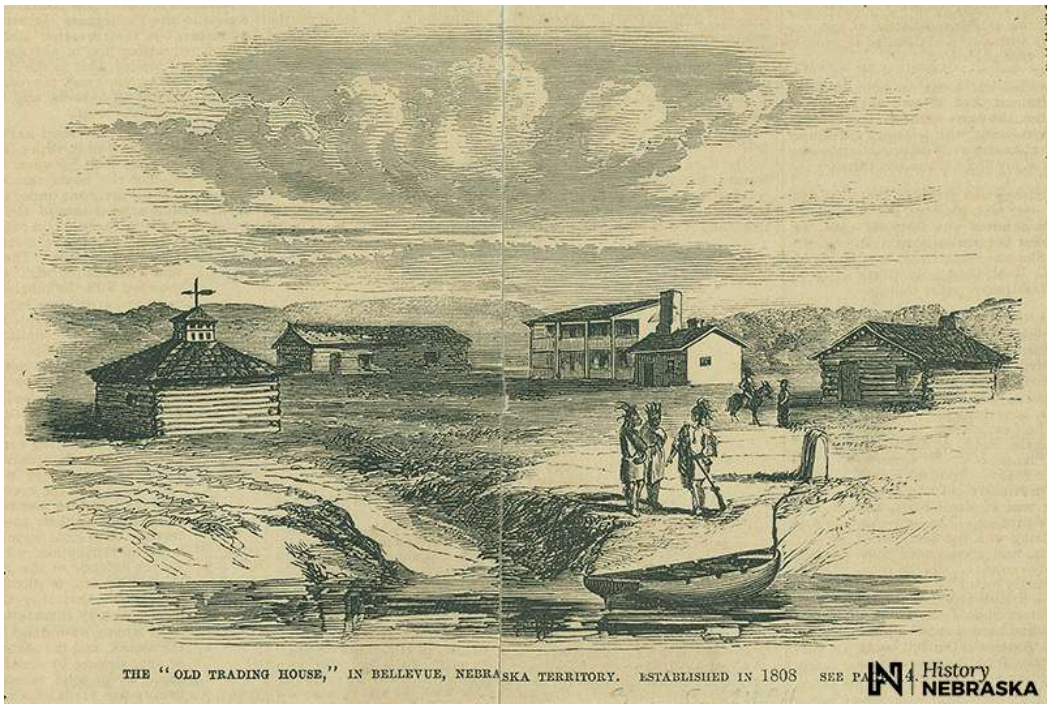


Illustration: Bellevue, Nebraska Territory, from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, *June 5, 1858. Contrary to the caption, there is no evidence that the Bellevue trading post existed prior to 1823.*

"Sarpy lived the life of a minor frontier baron," writes John Wickman, who says Sarpy was known for his hospitality and for his love of "fast horses, fine hunting dogs, and a considerable interest in the pleasures of liquor."

Throughout his life, Sarpy cultivated a reputation for both generosity and ruthlessness. Missionary Samuel Allis described him in ways that reveal as much about the time and place as

about the man himself. Allis said that Sarpy, “although sometimes rough and uncouth, was a high-toned gentleman, who exerted a great influence among the whites as well as the Indians. He was particularly generous to white men of distinction and wealth, also to the Indians when it paid well, but exacted every penny of his hired men and others who earned their living by labor. Still he was generous to the needy… He was all that could be wished for a man of the world, except the habit of intemperance.”

Peter Sarpy died in Plattsmouth in 1865. His body was returned to St. Louis for burial, but it’s said that his wife Nicomi remained in the Plattsmouth area.

Illustration: This 1894 oil painting by Ad Albrect is based on an 1850s sketch by Stanislas Schimonsky. It shows Bellevue near the end its trading post days, but the Missouri River bluffs seem to have grown to legendary proportions in the retelling—much like Sarpy himself. History Nebraska 300P

The 1852 portrait of Sarpy at the top of this page is shown after its 2011 restoration by paintings conservator Kenneth Bé at History Nebraska's **Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center**.

Sources:

Larsen, Lawrence H., Barbara J. Cottrell, Harl A. Dalstrom, Kay Calamé Dalstrom, *Upstream Metropolis: An Urban Biography of Omaha & Council Bluffs* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska

Press, 2007), 24.

Jensen, Richard E., *The Fontenelle & Cabanné Trading Posts: The History and Archeology of Two Missouri River Sites, 1822-1838* (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, 1998).

"Pilcher, Fontenelle and Sarpy," NebraskaStudies (NET, History Nebraska, Nebraska Department of Education), http://nebraskastudies.org/1800-1849/fur-traders-missionaries/joshua-pilcher/

Wickman, John E., "Peter A. Sarpy," in LeRoy R. Hafen, ed., *The Mountain Men and the Fur Trade of the Far West*, Vol. 4 (Glendale, CA: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1966), 283-96.

Conserving a 224-Year-Old Gift Given to Chief Blackbird

The document after treatment. In addition to the writing there is a coat of arms at the top, a drawing of a soldier and Native American shaking hands at the bottom, and a drawing of a shield and weapons on the lower proper right.

When Francois Louis Hector, the Baron de Carondelet and Spanish Governor of Louisiana, awarded a medal to the Omaha Chief Blackbird in 1796, this document came with it. Unfortunately, the years hadn't exactly been kind to this 224 year-old document. When it arrived at our **Ford Conservation Center**, it was in pretty rough shape. There had been measures to take care of it many years ago after it split along the fold lines, but they were failing.

The cloth backing used to support it was too degraded and thin to properly support it. The adhesive used to line it had deteriorated and was causing discoloration. And to top it all off, it was really dirty. Thankfully, Hilary LeFevere, our **expert Paper Conservator at the Ford Center**, was able to do the hard task of properly conserving this piece of Nebraska history.

This little timelapse shortens the long process so you can see it for yourself from start to finish.

For those interested, this is the translated text of the document:

The Baron of Carondelet, Knight of the Religion of St. John, Field Marshal of the Royal Armies, Governor General, Vice Lord of the Manor of the Provinces of Louisiana and Western Florida, Sub-Inspector General of the Troops and Militias of the same.

In consideration of the proofs of fidelity and friendship which we have had from the Indian called Wazhinga Sabe (L'Oiseau Noir)of the Mahas Nation maintaining strict union with the Spaniards, and venerating the respectable and high name of our catholic monarch (whom God preserve) Emperor of Spain and the Indias, from his bravery and influence among all the neighboring nations. And from his knowledge and excellent ability to command with the skill that it required,

Therefore desiring to reward such commendable circumstance we have decided to name him as Chief of the small medal, advising him of the estimation in which he should hold it, and the obligation he is under to govern his people well, maintaining them in the quet and respect which they owe to the Spaniards and teaching the veneration which is due to the Great King of Spain. Therefore we order the commanders of the ports of this province, officers, soldiers, and citizens to recognize him as Chief of the small medal. As to the Indians of his nation and others whoever they may be, they shall all respect and obey him.

Given in New Orleans on the 12th of May 1796. By order of his excellency, Andres Lopez Arnesto. The Baron of Carondelet.

We've also included three detail images of the document below if you want to take a closer look at some of the different parts of it.

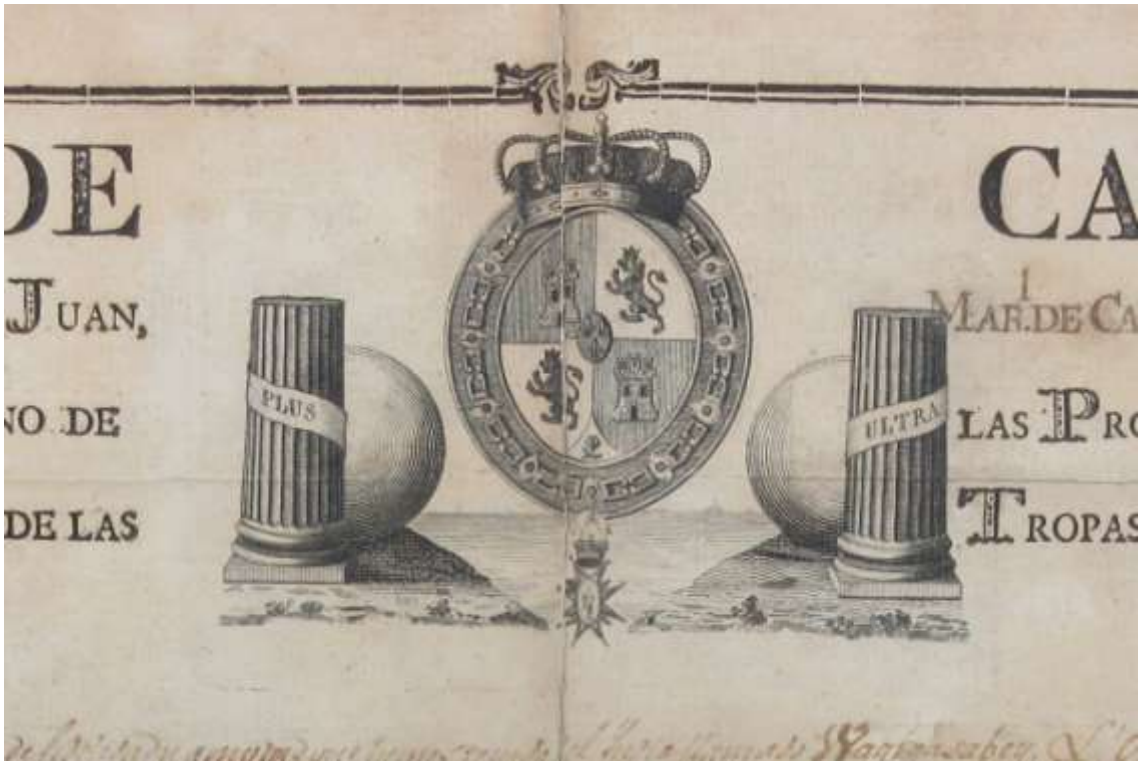
EL BARON DE

CABALLERO DE LA RELIGION DE SAN JUAN,

BERNADOR GENERAL VICE PATRONO DE

OCCIDENTAL, SUB INSPECTOR GENERAL DE LAS

EN atencion



DE

JUAN,

NO DE

DE LAS

CA

MAR. DE CA

LAS PRO

TROPAS

Saving Slickers

The staff in the Objects Lab at the Ford Center had an extraordinary challenge this year. They were presented with a group of twelve archeological rubber raincoats, also known as slickers. This group of rubber raincoats is part of the collection of the Steamboat Bertrand, shipwrecked in 1865 and excavated in 1969 in what is now De Soto Wildlife Refuge.

The double-breasted coats are constructed of loosely woven cotton cloth coated with rubber. The bodies, sleeves, and collars of the coats are adhered together rather than being sewn. Large flapped patch pockets are attached to the side fronts of each coat and closure is secured by four pairs of buttons down the center front.

The coats vary in condition. Some of them are almost like new. The rubber is still very supple and can be easily moved and manipulated. Others are extremely brittle. The slightest touch can cause them to shatter. Because of their materials and construction methods, these rare and fragile artifacts have special support and storage needs. Rubber deteriorates in the presence of oxygen and as it degrades, it off-gasses chemicals that can further damage the materials. The goal for treatment was to create new supports and place each slicker in a oxygen-free environment.

About twenty years ago, the slickers were given new internal supports. These were made with a knitted fabric stuffed with polyester fill material. Over the years, the rubber had continued to deteriorate and stiffen. Ideally, new supports would be created to help maintain their appropriate shape.

Technicians Megan Griffiths and Vonnda Shaw hold open one of the flexible slickers so intern Kayla can photograph the inside. Most of the slickers were too brittle to be able to open this way. You can see the stuffed Tyvek support pillows and the MicroChamber tray.

When they arrived, each slicker was carefully examined and the structural and surface condition of each was documented. Each slicker was gently surfaced cleaned using a soft bristle brush and a HEPA vacuum. Most of the slickers were too fragile to handle and removing the old supports would cause more harm than good. Of the twelve that were brought in, only four slickers received new supports. These were custom made from Tyvek and stuffed with polyester fill material and shredded MicroChamber paper.

Inside the package are oxygen absorbers. After the boxes were flushed with nitrogen, the oxygen absorbers were placed in a small tray to remove the remaining oxygen. The pink dot is an oxygen indicator. In the presence of oxygen, the dot will turn purple, as seen in the tray on the right. Also on the tray is a humidity indicator that shows the humidity inside the packaging. The clear plastic envelope around the box ensures that museum staff can periodically check the slickers for condition issues and the presence of oxygen. They can also make a small opening in the envelope to replace the oxygen absorbers in the near future and reseal the package without disturbing the slickers themselves.

Each slicker was placed on a support board and put inside a open tray. The boards and trays are made of MicroChamber board. Microchamber products contain zeolites that adsorb gaseous chemicals from the air.. The rehoused slickers in their trays each were placed inside a custom-made bag that is impermeable to oxygen. The bags were flushed with nitrogen and oxygen absorbers were put inside to bring own the oxygen levels and slow down the rate of deterioration. Once the oxygen absorbers were placed inside and the nitrogen was flushed, the bags were sealed. Oxygen indicators were placed inside and on the sides of the trays so the oxygen levels can be monitored.

Technician Megan Griffiths measures the height of the "bubble" created when the envelope was flushed with nitrogen. The museum staff has limited room to store the slickers so each box and bubble had to fit withing their parameters.

Although there is nothing that can be done to return the slickers to their original state, the oxygen-free environment can slow down the deterioration so these unique objects can be studied for years to come.

Get to Know Your Friendly State Preservationist

Jill Dolberg, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

You might be wondering what a preservationist even is. And before you ask, it's not someone who enjoys canning fruits or vegetables nor is it someone involved in cryogenics. A historic preservationist is someone who works to support the preservation of old buildings and artifacts. These people are professionals who serve their communities by educating and helping people to use historic resources in creative new ways.

Jill Dolberg is the Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer for History Nebraska and a preservationist. She loves her job and her work is inspired by her passion for history, architecture, and, most importantly, the people that give meaning to these historic places. A job in historic preservation can mean a lot of paperwork and regulatory work, but there is certainly a fun side. I interviewed Jill to learn more about those moments that excite a preservationist: getting to see the inside of a closed-off building, listening to people tell about their local histories, and seeing a once-forgotten old building get a second chance.

What is the most surprising thing you have learned about old buildings while

working as a preservationist?

Two things: We know that human beings have an impact on places through wear and tear but buildings actually do better when people are living in them and using them regularly. A building's well-being is tied to people paying attention and noticing things like leaking pipes or a hole in the roof. The next thing is that there is no such thing as "maintenance free" fixes for buildings. When you own a property, half of what you are doing is staving off entropy.

How long have you been a preservationist?

Wyuka Cemetary, Lincoln, NE

I think that I was born a preservationist! There is something in me that is a rule-follower and I want to take care of places so other people can enjoy them. On a trip to Spain, I visited the Alhambra and was deeply impressed by it, but I was also appalled by people who were crawling past the ropes and disrespecting the building.

I finally learned what preservation was in 1994 through an internship with Ed Zimmer—I spent a summer researching the graves in Wyuka Cemetery. It was amazing to see how a local place can be so connected with national history.

What inspired you to become a preservationist?

Travel. My father was handicapped so we didn't go skiing or to the beach. But my father loved to visit historic places—places where things happened. He instilled that appreciation in me. There are places where history really resonates and you can feel it while you are there—you feel a connection that you can't get from a book. At the time, I didn't have the right vocabulary to describe it but I felt it.

What is the most interesting thing/story/place you have encountered while traveling the state of Nebraska?

One of the first trips that I went on after starting my job at History Nebraska was to Scottsbluff. There was an apartment building that had been turned into a bed and breakfast. The owners entertained us with a ghost story that was so believable. I remember the people that I have met while traveling across the state more than anything. I am most inspired by the people that I meet, especially those who have plans for old buildings and who can bring a building back from the edge.

What accomplishment from working at History Nebraska are you most proud of?

I am really proud of the things that I have done that will linger. I first started working with the Nebraska Historic Resource Survey and Inventory and oversaw over 17 different county surveys—those will last. I have also written over 50 different National Register nominations. I feel a personal connection to the places that I have written nominations for, it almost feels like I am a 1% owner of the properties.

As a preservationist, what are the types of things you notice that make your friends and family think you are crazy?

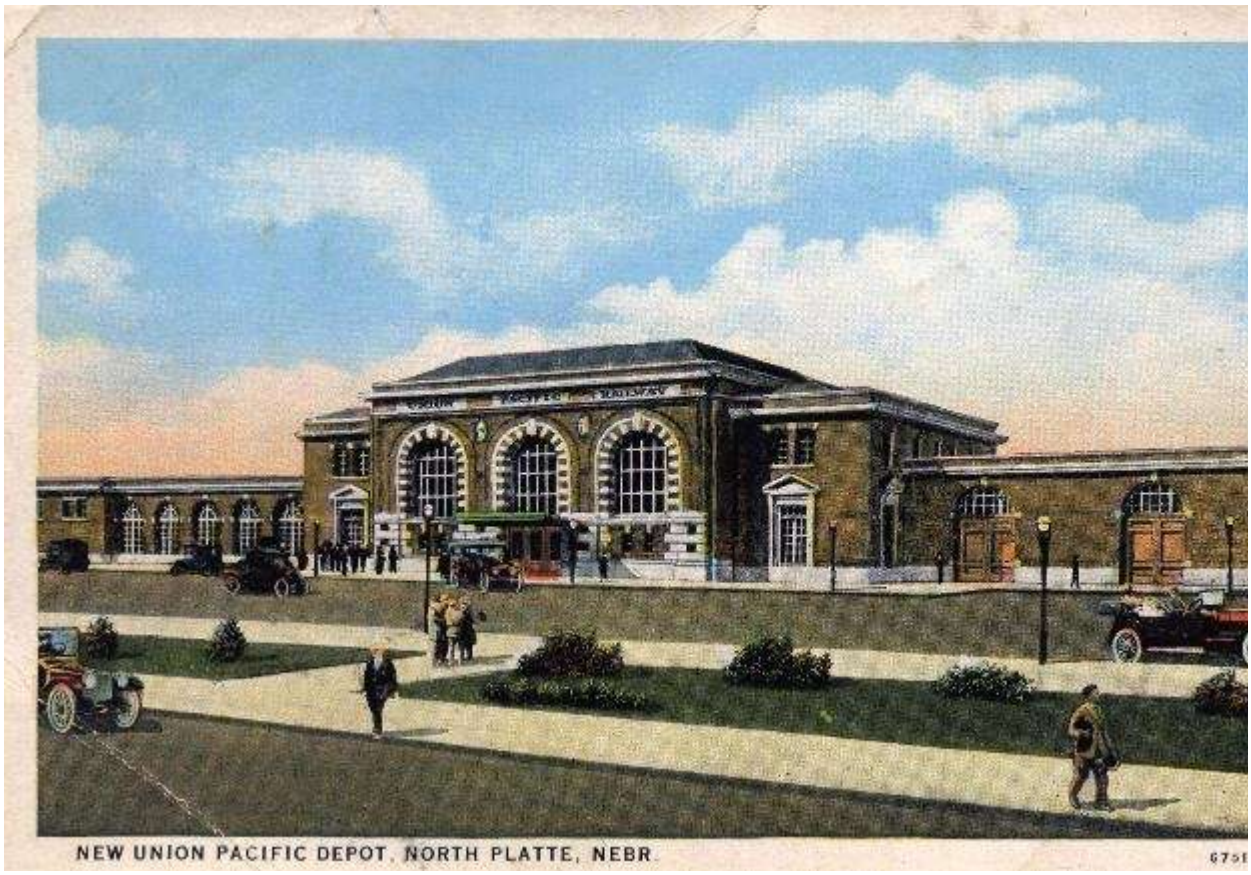
I am forever noticing the little details that tell me if a building has been changed. If someone offhand comments about a beautiful old house, I will immediately notice some of the historically inappropriate work done to it. You come off as being critical sometimes or a purist.

When I was looking for a house with my husband, we went to 80 showings because I was adamant about having original windows and features.

If you had an endless supply of and money/time and no restrictions, what preservation-related project would you love to take on?

The things that I worry the most about are those that you can't adequately prepare for like floods or earthquakes. I worry about a beautiful church in Assisi, Italy—if an earthquake came it would shake that place apart. I would love to put a bubble around some special places that would protect them from natural disasters.

If you could go back in time, is there a particular building/structure that you would like to see or save?



North Platte Depot

At this moment it might be Notre Dame because that wound is so fresh. For a more local example, I would have loved to see the train depot that once housed the North Platte Canteen. The community's identity is so tied up with the Canteen—it is sad that the building is no longer there

- Jessica Tebo

Portrait of the Preservationist as a Young Woman

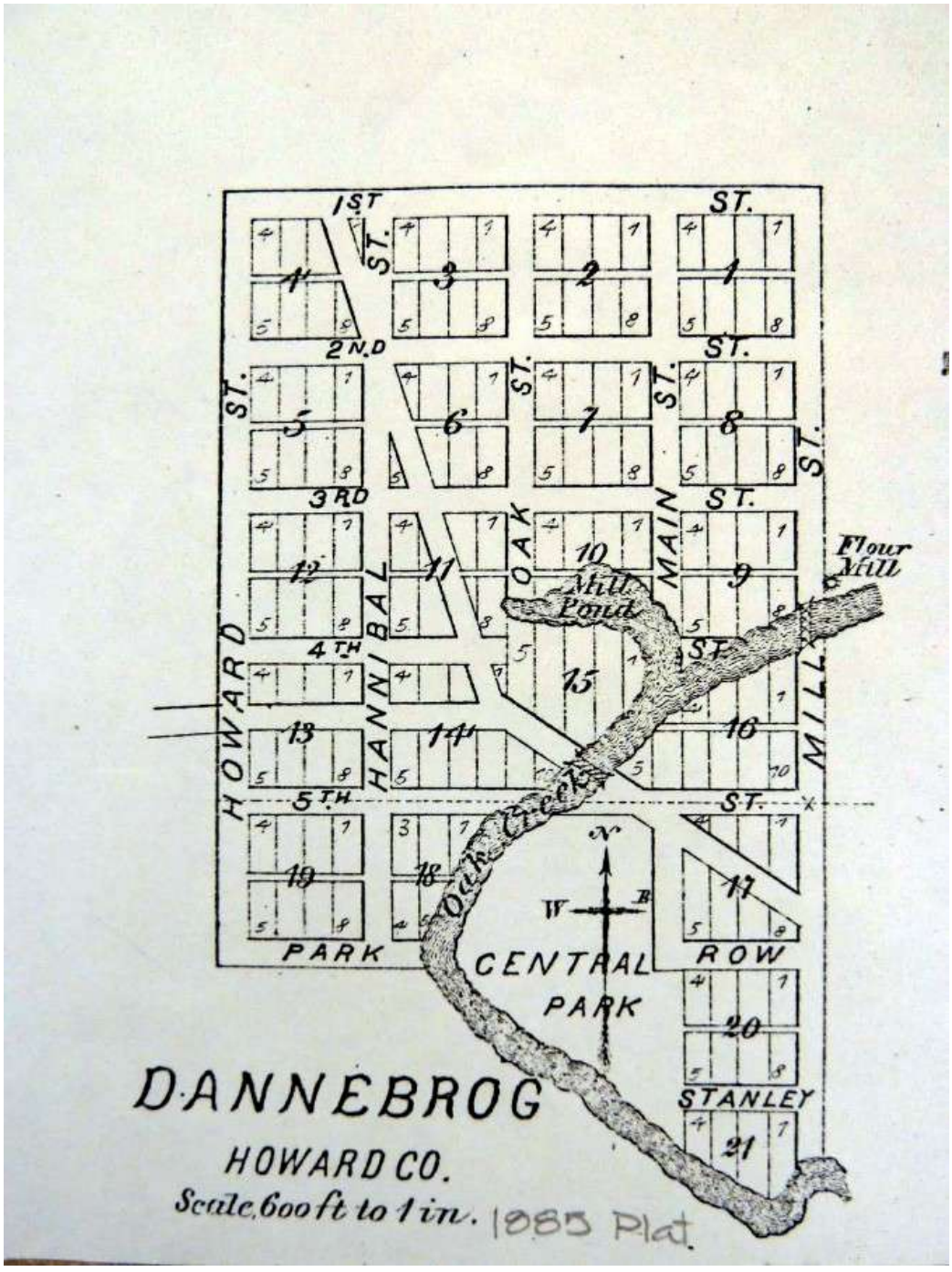
I was a preservationist before I knew what a preservationist was. How did this happen? I grew up around architecture because my father and grandfather were real estate agents. When my father held open houses, my mother, brother, and I would oftentimes stop by to say hi and bring him something to eat. I always enjoyed walking around the houses and admiring any interesting architectural details.

My father was also a real estate appraiser and drafter. During the summer and school holidays

when my father needed to appraise farmsteads, he would take me to neighboring county seats to look up information in their courthouses. We would find what he needed and drive around the surrounding countryside to look at the farmsteads he needed to appraise. My father would give me a plat map and ask me to navigate our way. This was a great introduction to map reading. And I still love looking at maps to this day. I would walk into the farmhouses and imagine the lives of the people who once lived there while admiring the architecture. The property I remember the most was an old Italianate farmhouse with a cupola. This house had a beautiful grand staircase, and it was fun going into the cupola to see the surrounding farmland.

My early introduction to architecture led me to consider a career as an architect. I enjoyed drawing house plans and talking to my father about them, but I decided that that career wasn't for me. Fortunately, the field of preservation offered an alternative path where I could channel my love of architecture into the saving of old buildings. I did not discover the large field of historic preservation until I was in college and graduate school. Today I work for History Nebraska as a **Certified Local Government Coordinator** where I seek to educate and empower communities to use their local historic resources.

An Italianate farmhouse in Indiana



Example of a Plat Map

History at the Corner of Chadron Avenue and West 2nd Street

On my frequent travels across Nebraska, I have seen and heard the stories of a lot of buildings. Some of these buildings house the stories of notable figures in Nebraska history, such as the **Senator George Norris House** in McCook, Nebraska. Other places tell us about events that shook communities, like George Mitchell Park in Oxford, Nebraska, which is the site of the 1967 salmonella outbreak during the annual Turkey Days celebration. My favorite story, at this time, is told by a two-story brick commercial building at the corner of Chadron Avenue and West 2nd Street in Chadron, Nebraska.

Mary Smith Hayward

The M.E. Smith & Co. Building, constructed in 1890, once belonged to Mary E. Smith Hayward. Although largely unknown in Nebraska history, Hayward was a successful businesswoman, political organizer, and vegetarian. Born in Liberty, Pennsylvania in 1842, Hayward struck out on her own in 1885 for Nebraska. That year she took up a claim just west of Chadron and also

established a dry goods business in town.

Hayward was a prominent member of the suffrage movement in Nebraska. She became president of the Nebraska Women's Suffrage Association in the 1890s. In 1895, Hayward refused to pay her taxes to protest women being unable to vote. She stated in 1895 that "the church is responsible for the subservient condition of women." In 1913, she represented Nebraska in the Women Suffrage Parade in Washington DC with an estimated 8,000 attendees. Hayward was also an animal rights activist. She was a lifelong member of the humane society and once had a man arrested for beating his horse.

The brick building at Chadron Avenue and West 2nd Street is a tangible connection to Mary E. Smith Hayward and her story. I have barely scratched the surface of what this extraordinary person contributed to her community, state, and country.

I encourage Nebraskans to ask questions and to learn more about the people who once lived in the old buildings still standing all across the state—you might discover that someone like Hayward used to live right next door!

- Ryan Reed, Tax Incentive Coordinator

Bringing the Property to You: Robber's Cave and Digital Preservation

From the very beginning of the project, History Nebraska's **State Historic Preservation Office (NeSHPO)** knew that adding Lincoln's **Robber's Cave** to the **National Register of Historic Places** was going to be anything but a typical nominating process. The cave, which has been the site of tours, social gatherings, and even some illegal activities since the late 1800s, has walls riddled with thousands of carvings that provide a fascinating record of its past visitors. Snapping a few poorly lit photos of the property would not even come close to capturing the cave's most essential features.

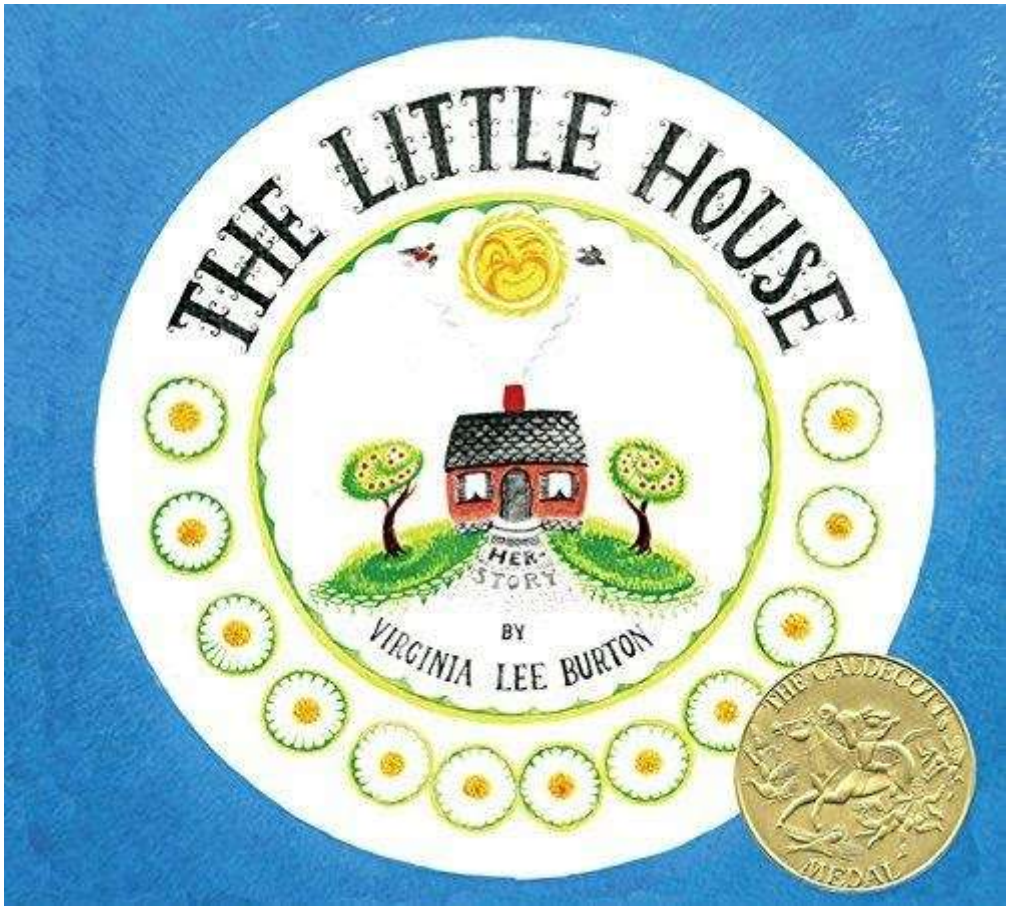
Convinced that this was an especially exciting opportunity, the NeSHPO and Matt Hansen, the volunteer who wrote the nomination, started thinking about using new technologies to better document this unique resource. Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) scanning caught their attention as an intriguing possibility. Unfortunately, neither the NeSHPO nor Hansen had access to this technology.

Enter Dr. Richard Wood of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. Through **a partnership with History Nebraska**, Dr. Wood and a team of graduate students conducted 92 LiDAR scans in the cave over three days. The result was over three-billion data points that captured the cave with sub-millimeter accuracy to produce an accurate set of measurements of each of the cave's five tunnels' length, height, width, and depth. Beyond just documenting its present state, the LiDAR data will help the owners monitor the cave to make informed decisions on how to preserve the cave while still allowing access. By comparing any future scans to the 2019 data, they will be able to measure the extent of deterioration of the cave and better evaluate the success of different evaluation methods.

These LiDAR scans were ultimately incorporated into the National Register nomination, which was recently approved. While National Register nominations have always been available to the public, the Nebraska SHPO and UNL's Engineering Department are pleased to now offer **full access to the LiDAR scans of Robber's Cave**. This single viewing platform allows people from all across the globe to see Robber's Cave without having to travel to Lincoln.

People often think that preservationists are stuck in the past—that they need to catch up with the times. Perhaps this is true in some cases, but the Nebraska SHPO is deeply invested in pursuing new technological resources and partnerships to better preserve historic resources while making them more accessible to all.

Learning About Preservation From Virginia Lee Burton's "The Little House"



In a quickly-changing world, the need for old places becomes more and more apparent. Old places have roots to anchor us—they are receptacles of memory that help us to better understand our own identities. At its very core, historic preservation seeks to honor that connection people inherently have between identity and place.

Virginia Lee Burton's classic The Little House (1942) speaks to the connection between place and identity with the direct emotional resonance that makes children's literature so powerful. Burton tells the story of a Little House who happily shelters the family who built her until she is eventually abandoned and falls into a state of disrepair. Her misfortune changes when she is found by the great-great-granddaughter of the man who built her. Inspired by her happy childhood memories, the woman decides to purchase, rehabilitate, and then move her family into the Little House.

While the Little House is undoubtedly the main protagonist of Burton's tale, I want to focus on the great-great-granddaughter and the moment she decides to reclaim the house. Even in its decrepit state, the woman instantly remembers the house as "the Little House my grandmother lived in when she was a little girl." Despite its faded paint and broken windows, the woman is still able to feel the love and pride of her family across time and space: the house has the power to transcend time, place, and generational differences.

The old places we cherish might not necessarily be on the **National Register of Historic Places**, but that does not diminish their importance. My great-grandmother's old farmhouse in Western Nebraska is a sacred space for me. I have not been back there since she died and I doubt that I will ever return. But I still hold this place in my heart because of its precious memories. It's the place where we made kolaches in the kitchen, where the adults played pinochle after dinner, and where all the grandkids slept in a big pile of sleeping bags and blankets in the living room.

I encourage you to ask a friend or family member the question: "Is there an old place special to you?" Their answer might surprise you, and you will learn a great deal about who they are and what they value.

A cross-stitch made by my great-grandmother

- Jessica Tebo

Nebraska writer Marion Marsh Brown

Marion Marsh Brown grew up in a hurry. She published her first story at age 10 and graduated from high school at age 14. Her beloved father died when she was a 15-year-old freshman at the Nebraska State Teacher's College (today's Peru State). Brown's family encouraged her to stay in school, and Brown graduated with high honors in three-and-a-half years. But it wasn't easy being so much younger than her classmates.

Brown went on to a long career as both a teacher and novelist. She wrote fiction and biographies for middle school students, and many of her books reflect her southeast Nebraska roots and her love of Nebraska history. Dan Holtz tells her story in the Spring 2020 issue of *Nebraska History*.

It's not hard to understand Holtz's affinity for Brown. He's a professor emeritus of history at Brown's alma mater, and something of a historical storyteller himself. But while Brown wrote fiction, Holtz's favorite medium is song (more about that below).

***

Brown's father had been a big influence on his precocious daughter. Cassius Brown was an early Nebraska newspaperman and an avid reader. When he died of tuberculosis, Brown's family encouraged her to stay in school and get on with her life. In later years, Brown acknowledged that "it was a social handicap to be so young in college and certainly wouldn't recommend it for any child today."

Still, she was popular and active at Peru State, being voted the college's "Representative Woman" in 1925, an award given to the student "most truly representing the School Spirit."

This odd angle camera shot, above left, shows future teachers getting brushed up on English in Miss Marion Marsh's classroom.

Brown taught high school before joining the faculty at Peru State and later the University of Nebraska at Omaha. Her first book, *Young Nathan* (1947) was a historical novel about Revolutionary War hero Nathan Hale. In 1959, Disney turned her book *The Swamp Fox* into a TV series.

Other stories were set in Nebraska—but usually not the wide-open prairies that influenced Willa Cather and Mari Sandoz. Brown's Nebraska was centered on the wooded bluffs along the Missouri River. Her 1971 novel *Marnie* is the most autobiographical of her books.

Photo: Early 1900s postcard showing Peru, Nebraska, as young Marion Marsh knew it. History Nebraska RG2304-8-44

Brown also wrote two books about Willa Cather, a history of Brownville, plus fictionalized biographies of Nebraskans John G. Neihardt, Susette La Flesche Picotte (the first Native American medical doctor), and Native American rights advocate Susan La Flesche Tibbles.

"She wrote primarily because she saw a need for more and better books for teenagers," Holtz writes, "but also because she admired and was intrigued by Nebraska writers, because she believed Native Americans had been treated unjustly, because she wanted to recreate the stories of pioneering and settlement in the plains, and simply because she loved to write."

***

Dan Holtz shares Brown's passion for Nebraska stories, but as musician he has a special appreciation for the power of song. In an earlier article for *Nebraska History* he examined "The Folk Songs of Homesteading." [LINK] He's recorded a number of those folk songs himself, and as a "historical songteller" writes and records original songs about Nebraska history. You can listen to them at his website, https://www.storysingerdanholtz.com/.

Dan's article, "Marion *Marsh Brown: A Continuing Legacy in Nebraska Writing," appears in the Spring 2020 issue* of *Nebraska History* Magazine. *Learn more about how you can receive the magazine by* ***becoming a History Nebraska member***.